

Approved by

AESCHYLUS' AGAMEMNON:

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A Translation

by

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## INTRODUCTION

My purpose in writing this translation has been two-fold: to produce a work which can be easily comprehended when read or staged, and to experiment with various English meters in an attempt to retain the dramatic movement of the original.

I have tried to maintain, as well as to clarify, the Greek meaning of each word as I rendered it in English, without attempting to produce a literal, line-by-line translation.

I have translated the majority of this play into free verse, with two exceptions: in the Third Stasimon, lines 681 through 781, I have employed alternating Alcaic and Sapphic stanza patterns, while the meter for the Fourth Stasimon, lines 975 through 1033, is derived from the theme and variation of the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 9, Opus 14, in E Major. The strict, quantitative values of these meters are intended to contrast with the free verse of the other choruses, as well as to provide a musical unity for the Stasimons.

I have inserted the line numbers of the Greek text only to indicate the sections into which the play is divided.

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## DIVISIONS OF THE PLAY

Prologue	1-39
Parados	40-104
First Stasimon	105-257
First Episode	258-354
Second Stasimon	355-474
Third Stasimon	681-781
Third Episode	782-974
Fourth Stasimon	975-1033
Fourth Episode	1034-1071
Kommos	1072-1177
Fifth Episode	1178-1405
Exodos	1406-1673



(A light appears)

THE AGAMEMNON

SCENE: Argos, in front of the palace of Agamemnon.

A watchman keeps his post on the roof of  
the palace. It is night.

WATCHMAN: I ask the gods deliverance from this task

1

Of watching year after year upon the roof of the  
Sons of Atreus. Here I lie, crouching like a  
Dog, my head resting on my arms. I have come  
To know the midnight assembly of stars, those  
Which bring winter, and those bringing summer  
To men, as rising and waning, they govern the  
Ethereal heavens with their brilliance. Here  
I wait, hoping to see the gleaming beacon of  
Fire which will announce the capture of Troy.  
Thus, this woman has commanded, whose heart is  
Strong with masculine pride. My bed is uneasy  
And wet with dew: instead of sleep and peaceful  
Dreams, I am visited only by terror, which stands  
Beside me to stop my eyes from closing in rest.  
And when I try to sing or hum, as an antidote  
Against sleep, my tune becomes a moan, my melody,  
A lament for the misfortunes of this ill-governed  
House. If only the beacon would appear and send  
Its message flashing through the night to bring a  
Happy end to my labors.

(Exit)

(A light appears)

Light! Light! Darkness fades into day and the  
Blaze of fire heralds the dances of celebration  
Honoring Argos' victory. I shall summon Agamemnon's  
Queen to rise quickly from her bed and cause the  
Palace halls to resound with the beacon's joyous  
Message---The City of Troy has been taken.  
I myself shall dance the choral prelude,  
Counting my master's lot as fortunate with  
My own triple sixes cast by the beacon's light.  
When the beloved king of this house arrives,  
May I hold his hand in mine. Concerning all  
Other things I shall be silent, as though the  
Weight of a great ox holds my tongue. The house  
Itself, if it could speak, would clearly explain  
Everything. But I shall speak only to those who  
Understand; to all others I shall be dumb.

(Exit)

CHORUS: It is now the tenth year since the sons of  
Atreus, Menelaos and King Agamemnon, who hold  
Their double-throned and double-sceptered power  
From Zeus, sailed from Argos as mighty adversaries  
Against Priam. Leading the strong Argive army and a  
Fleet of a thousand ships, their cries of war pierced  
The air like the screams of vultures who wheel high  
Above the nest, beating the air with their wings as  
They search for their nestlings who have suffered

40

A lingering death. But high in the heavens there  
Is one, either Pan or Zeus or Apollo, who hears the  
Shrill lamentations of sky-dwelling birds and sends  
The late-avenging Erinyes against the transgressors.  
Thus Almighty Zeus, God of Hospitality, hurled  
The sons of Atreus against Alexander. And for  
The sake of one adulterous woman, Danaans and  
Trojans alike endured countless battles, their  
Bodies deadened with fatigue, their knees  
Imprinted with grime and dust, their spears  
Riven in the first encounter. The outcome is now suspended  
In time awaiting Destiny to end what was long  
Ago begun. Neither smouldering sacrifices  
Nor flowing libations will alleviate the  
Inexorable wrath of the gods. We have been  
Left behind because our ancient bodies are  
Worthless to an avenging army, for only with  
Our feeble, childlike strength do we support  
Our weight upon staves. The strength which  
Governs the heart of a child is as frail as  
The strength of an old man, and neither  
Possesses the spirit of war. For when the  
Mature leaf of manhood withers to old age,  
A man is no stronger than a child, a vagrant  
Dream at midday who wanders on three feet.

(Klytaimestra enters;  
the chorus continues.)



Daughter of Tyndareus, Queen Klytaimestra,

Strophe 1

105

What news has persuaded you to dispatch orders

For burnt sacrifices? The altars of all the

Gods, those of the city, those who live above

And below the earth, and those who guard the

Market places, blaze with your offerings.

The flames leap toward Heaven first from one place,

Then from another, soothed and persuaded by soft

And holy unguents which kings have long preserved

In the deepest recesses of the palace. Tell me

Those things which are appropriate and fitting,

And relieve the infectious anxiety growing within

My heart. For from the rapacious flames of anguish

Which consume my soul, hope is born anew to avert my grief.

Black, the other silver-white.

While the Kings of Hellas watched,

The eagles fell upon a hare, slaying

Her and the unborn young, ending her

Last swift escape.

I sing of sorrow, sorrow;

But virtue shall prevail.

And when the prophet Calchas saw

The single purpose of the  
Divine inspiration is mine

To chant the powerful song  
Of fate-driven men

Blessed with an omen  
From Zeus.

I sing of the darting birds  
Which drove the twin-throned

Pair against the land of  
Teucer to fulfill one vengeful

Purpose.  
Fate shall destroy its people and wealth.

For there appeared in the heavens  
Two majestic eagles, one deepest

Black, the other silver-white.  
Of Artemis. For she hates the winged

While the Kings of Hellas watched,  
Dogs of Zeus which consumed the wretched

The eagles fell upon a hare, slaying  
Her and the unborn young, ending her

Last swift escape.  
But virtue shall prevail.

I sing of sorrow, sorrow;  
But virtue shall prevail.

I sing of sorrow, sorrow;  
But virtue shall prevail.

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But virtue shall prevail.

I sing of sorrow, sorrow;  
But virtue shall prevail.

And when the prophet Calchas saw  
The single purpose of the  
Eagles, he knew them  
To be the sons of

Atreus,  
United in war against  
A common foe. Thus

He explained the omen:

"In time these two shall seize Priam's  
City,

And under Troy's walls, Violent  
Fate shall destroy its people and wealth.  
May not the army which curbs  
Troy be condemned by the wrath  
Of Artemis. For she hates the winged  
Dogs of Zeus which consumed the wretched  
Hare and her young."

I sing of sorrow, sorrow;  
But virtue shall prevail.

Such evil portents, and many good signs as well,  
Calchas interpreted from the fatal omen which  
Appeared on the road to the King's palace.

And in unison with him

I sing of sorrow, sorrow;  
But virtue shall prevail.



"Lovely Artemis is gentle to the  
Tender cubs of fierce lions,  
And merciful to all the young  
Wild creatures which roam the  
Forests and fields.  
Yet she demands that both the  
Good and evil portents of this  
Omen be fulfilled.  
But with this plea I invoke Apollo, the Healer:  
Do not let the Danaan ships be  
Detained in port by adverse winds,  
For this shall compel another sacrifice,  
Unhallowed, which none may eat.  
And from this sacrifice shall  
Originate family discord and murder.

For Wrath shall remember,  
And with Deceit,  
Shall lie in wait within the house  
To avenge the slaughter of a child."  
Such evil portents, and many good signs as well,  
Calchas interpreted from the fatal omen which  
Appeared on the road to the King's palace.

And in unison with him  
I sing of sorrow; sorrow;  
But virtue shall prevail.

Strophe 2

Zeus! If this name

Is pleasing to him,

By this name I shall

Invoke him.

For I have pondered long,

Yet I can find no way

To cast from my mind

This burden of vain cares:

No relief, except through Zeus.

Discretion and wisdom are forced upon us

By the violent grace of the august gods.

Antistrophe 2

Antistrophe 3

The first Great One,

Swollen with courage

And strength, shall never

Be mentioned

Again. The second who

Followed also succumbed

To the victor. But

The man who praises the

Triumph of Zeus, shall find truth.

Achaïans waited on the shore near Kalchis,

At Aulis where the roaring tides ebb and flow.

Strophe 3

Zeus, who guided mortals to seek  
 Knowledge, has decreed that  
 Wisdom comes only through suffering.  
 And in our sleep  
 The pain of memory, the flower of the Argive  
 Distilled by drops, the bitter wind,  
 The prophet Seeps the grievous remedy  
 Into our hearts.; and the sons of Atreus  
 Thus, despite our own desires,  
 Discretion and wisdom are forced upon us  
 By the violent grace of the august gods.

Antistrophe 3

The elder king said to them:  
 The Commander-in-Chief of the  
 Achaian host did not  
 Blame the prophet when suddenly a  
 Blast of Fortune with her maiden blood before  
 Bound the ships in port, and  
 Depleting their the ships? For it is  
 Natural Stores, they should desire this sacrifice  
 Of Bred a famine appease and  
 Throughout the camp; while the oppressed  
 Achaians waited on the shore near Kalchis,  
 At Aulis where the roaring tides ebb and flow.



Strophe 4

The winds blew from the Strymon  
Bringing indolence and hunger and delay.  
And while the men wandered aimlessly,  
Neglecting the ship cables, time redoubled  
Its length and withered the flower of the Argive  
Army. But then, against the bitter wind,  
The prophet shouted the grievous remedy  
Which Artemis decreed; and the sons of Atreus  
Struck the earth with their sceptres,  
No longer able to restrain their tears.

And send them into battle

To avenge a woman.

Antistrophe 4

The elder king said to them:  
"My fate is severe if I disobey the  
Commands of Artemis and grievous if  
I sacrifice my child, the glory of my  
House, staining my hands with her maiden blood before  
The altar. Each choice is evil. How can  
I desert the army and the ships? For it is  
Natural that they should desire this sacrifice  
Of maiden blood to appease and  
Calm the angry winds. May good yet prevail."

Atreus. And muted stillness

Reigned by force of might.

Strophe 5

Strophe 6

And when he was compelled by necessity  
To bear the yoke of Fate,  
Impious thoughts governed his heart  
And without shame he contemplated  
The unholy deed.

The frenzy of infatuation  
Creates base desires  
And men dare to be rash.

Thus, he boldly killed his daughter  
Offering her to free the ships  
And send them into battle  
To avenge a woman.

In songs of filial love and devotion,

Antistrophe 5

The leaders, eager for war, did not heed her  
Pleas, her piteous cries  
Of Father! Father! But at his  
Command, they placed her on the altar  
Like a lamb, her robes  
Wrapped around her. High, high above the  
Altar they raised her, and  
Bound her lovely lips with  
A curb to silence the hateful  
Curses screamed against the house of  
Atreus. And muted stillness  
Reigned by force of might.

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Strophe 6

Antistrophe 6

Her robe, dyed with the saffron's  
Brightest hue,  
Slipped to the earth at her feet,  
And her piteous gaze  
Inspired compassion.  
Lovely as a fine engraving,  
She lay upon the altar,  
Unable to speak,  
Remembering happier times  
At her father's table  
When she had raised her pure voice  
In songs of filial love and devotion,  
While her father honored her  
With libations of blessing.



(Chorus turns to Klytaimnestra)

Antistrophe 6

Klytaimnestra, I have come in reverence of your power,

For it is fitting to honor the wife of the king

What happened next I cannot

Say, for I

Did not witness the outcome.

But the prophecies of

Calchas never fail, for

Men are taught Justice through suffering,

And learn of the future when

It comes. Never try

To foresee what will be, for such

Anticipation brings

Premature grief. But with the

Dawn of coming day, all things shall be revealed

May good fortune follow; thus

She prays who guards our land.

KLYTAIMNESTRA: Fine. They indicate your loyalty.

CHORUS: How can you be so certain of the victory?

Have you any proof?

KLYTAIMNESTRA: Of course I have proof...unless I

Have been tricked by a god.

CHORUS: You haven't been persuaded by a dream, have you?

KLYTAIMNESTRA: I do not trust the illusions of a sleeping mind.

CHORUS: Has an idle rumor gratified your fancy?

(Chorus turns to Klytaimestra)

Klytaimestra, I have come in reverence of your power; 257

For it is fitting to honor the wife of the king

When he is absent from the throne.

Do you offer these sacrifices merely in hope,

Or because you have already heard some good news?

I am eager to hear; but I shall understand if you

Do not wish to speak.

KLYTAIMESTRA: There is an old saying: "May good news

Come as dawn is born from the womb of night."

You shall hear a message surpassing your greatest

Hopes of joy: The men of Argos have captured the

City of Priam.

CHORUS: What? I can hardly believe...

KLYTAIMESTRA: I said, The Achians have taken Troy.

Do I not speak clearly?

CHORUS: Tears of joy overwhelm me.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Fine. They indicate your loyalty.

CHORUS: How can you be so certain of the victory?

Have you any proof?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Of course I have proof...unless I

Have been tricked by a god.

CHORUS: You haven't been persuaded by a dream, have you?

KLYTAIMESTRA: I do not trust the illusions of a sleeping mind.

CHORUS: Has an idle rumor gratified your fancy?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Apparently you think I am a child  
Babbling nonsense.

CHORUS: Well, then, when was the city destroyed?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Last night, during the hours of darkness  
Which gave birth to this dawn.

CHORUS: What messenger could arrive so quickly?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Hephaistos kindled the first bright flame on Ida  
And beacon after beacon relayed the message here.  
From Ida to the Hermaion rocks of Lemnos,  
The flame was received again at Athos, sacred to Zeus,  
Where it skimmed the top of the sea as it spanned  
The straits. Pine boughs, flaming into golden sun bursts,  
Announced the joyous message to the watchman on  
Makistos, who did not delay, but dispatched the  
Message far over the streams of Euripos to the  
Waiting guards at Messapion. And they, kindling a  
Mass of silver-gray heather, sent the strong, undaunted  
Flame swiftly over the plain of Asopos. Like the moon's  
Gleaming orb, it traveled to the crags of Kithairon,  
Rousing in succession other watchmen who kindled a  
Blaze more brilliant than any of those before.  
The light darted over the lake of Gorgopis and on to  
Mount Aigioplanktos where it urged another relay to  
Send a beard of flame far beyond the Saronic strait.  
At last the flame arrived at nearby Mount Arachnaios  
Where the watchman dispatched it to strike upon the  
Roof of the sons of Atreus. Thus it came, the child



Of the beacon born at Ida. Such was the range of the  
Torch-bearers who relayed the message to each station  
In succession; the victory of the race belongs to  
Both the first and last runners. This is the evidence  
Which I contend was sent to me from Troy by my husband.

CHORUS LEADER: Presently, Queen, I shall express my  
Gratitude to the gods. But now I wish to hear the  
Story once again, so that I may marvel as you tell it.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Today the Achaians possess Troy,  
Where even now the city echoes with discordant cries.  
For if you try to mix vinegar and oil in the same  
Vessel, they will not blend, but will separate in enmity.  
Likewise, Troy resounds with the distinct voices of  
Both the conqueror and the conquered, dissonant through Fate.  
Trojan survivors kneel beside their dead husbands and  
Brothers, while children, who will never again be free,  
Cling to their aged parents, mourning the death of their  
Dearest kin. Midnight prowling after battle has whetted  
The appetites of the Achaians; they range through  
The city, disordered and ravenous, seeking to  
Break their fast where Fortune guides them. Free from  
The frost and dew of midnight air, no longer  
Wakened for sentry duty, the happy men sleep  
Soundly all night in captured Trojan homes.  
The Achaian victory can be reversed only if the  
Soldiers dishonor the gods of the city or  
Desecrate the temples of those divinities who



Dwell in the captured land. May not the  
Tempting desire for wealth seize the army,  
Causing them to plunder what they should not;

For in order to win a safe return from Troy,  
They must carefully run the second lap of the race.

But even if they do not anger the gods,  
Other disasters may occur, for suffering is ever  
Vigilant; it does not slumber with the sleeping dead.  
May good prevail for all to recognize clearly,  
For I have vowed to benefit from these blessings.  
Now you have heard what a woman has to say.

CHORUS LEADER: Queen, you have spoken like a wise and  
Prudent man. Now that I have heard your reliable  
Evidence, I shall thank the gods who have rewarded us  
With blessings worthy of our labors.

O Zeus Divine and Night Benevolent,

355

Bestower of honor and glory,

Who ensnared the towering walls of Troy

In the closely-woven net;

Of all-enslaving Ate---

Coils which neither young

Nor old could escape.

I reverence all-mighty Zeus,

God of Hospitality,

Who bent his bow with careful precision

To hurl his dart against Alexander,

So that it neither fell short to earth

Nor soared high above the stars.

Antistrophe 1

Child of Ate.

Strophe 1

Men say:

The stroke of Zeus

Is clear and unmistakable,

For what he decrees is fulfilled.

An impious man once believed

That the gods do not deign

To punish men who tread

Upon the honor of sacred laws.

But Justice sends retribution

To the descendants of men

Whose spirits are contentious

And whose homes are replete

With wealth.

May I possess wealth

Only to avert misery;

But may I be rich

In wisdom and understanding.

For gold affords no protection

For the man, who in arrogance,

Effaces the Altar of Justice.

Strophe 2  
Antistrophe 1

When she left  
When the mother to her citizens  
Child of Ate, Archipe, Sisyphus, and  
Enticing Persuasion, impels  
Men toward evil, all remedies  
Are vain, for the ugly glow of  
Iniquity cannot turn  
Be concealed. The unjust  
Man is like base metal which blackens  
When tested at the touchstone, or  
Like a child who vainly  
Pursues a flying bird, for  
He brings affliction to  
The state. to the house and to its kings,  
None of the gods heeds  
His prayers, but plot destruction  
For the unrighteous man  
Whose actions and deeds are unjust.  
Likewise, Paris, by stealing a  
Queen from the sons of the House of  
Atreus, disgraced Hospitality.

He stares at her graceful statues  
Now hateful to his sight."

When she left

She bequeathed to her citizens

A legacy of warships

And shields, spears

And bloodshed;

And upon Troy

She bestowed in turn

A dowry of destruction.

Quickly she fled through

The city gates, daring what

None should dare. "These are the

And the prophets of the house,

Earlier Lamenting, spoke:

"Woe to the house and to its kings,

Woe to the marriage bed on who sailed

Where love was once affirmed.

Bearing his disgrace in silence

He sits alone, yearning for his

Wife, now far beyond the sea, at to

While a spectre rules his home.

With empty, bitter eyes

He stares at her graceful statues

Now hateful to his sight." lected

From funeral pyres.



"Memories, barriers with the lives of men

Sweetly sad, haunt his dreams to

Bring elusive delights.

In vain he

Endeavors heavy with tears.

To embrace the

Vision that slips from

His hands and vanishes

On swift wings down the

Pathway of sleep." These are the

Sorrows which

Earlier sat on the hearth.

Now, there are worse:

In the homes of those men who sailed

Together for Troy, the

Hearts of many are pierced

With grief surpassing endurance.

For the young men who were sent to

Ilion now return home:

The women who remained

Receive them again in

Sorrow---lifeless dust collected

From funeral pyres.

Ares, who barter with the lives of men  
 As he tips the scale of battle,  
 Is sending home from Troy  
 Urns of ashes,  
 Sodden and heavy with tears.  
 Laments are mixed with eulogies:  
 This man was an experienced warrior;  
 That soldier died nobly in combat.  
 Yet the unspoken thought remains  
 For widows to whisper in secret:  
 "Our men died for another man's wife."  
 While the jealous murmurs grow,  
 Silent vengeance creeps toward  
 The sons of Atreus.  
 For there beside the walls of Ilion,  
 In hostile and hated earth,  
 The fair young victors of this war  
 Lie buried.

The citizens speak in voices laden  
With wrath, demanding vengeance  
In payment of debt, while the city.  
The fear of what this is true?  
I may learn is veiled in night.  
The gods do not ignore those who  
Have killed many men. In time the black,  
Vengeful Erinyes destroy the man  
Who prospers unrighteously. He  
Fades--a feeble shadow in that dark  
Unseen World where he can never be  
Acquitted for his unjust  
Deeds. Grandeur brings grief, for  
The lightning of Zeus  
Strikes the haughty and proud. I prefer to  
Be unenvied, neither  
A conqueror of men, nor a  
Captive.

CHORUS LEADER: We shall soon know

Whether the flaming succession

Of torches and signal fires

Has transmitted truth

Or a pleasant dream to deceive

Our minds. I see a herald

Coming from the beach, his brow

Shaded with olive leaves, and dry dust,

(Chorus members speak  
individually as indicated.)

Clinging to the mud which soils his feet.  
AN OLD MAN: The beacon's flaming message

475

His appearance assures me  
Has quickly spread the rumor  
That he shall not be a silent  
Of good news throughout the city.  
Messenger who sends cryptic signals  
But who knows if this is true?  
From bouldering mountain timbers.  
Perhaps it is a lie  
He will clearly tell us whether  
Perpetrated by the gods.

ANOTHER OLD MAN: Who could be so childish

But I shall not mention the alternative.  
Or so senseless as to let his heart  
May the good which we have already seen be increased.  
Become enflamed over a beacon?  
I say: And may he who prays otherwise for the city  
Eventually he shall despair  
Taste the fruits of his own sinful heart.  
When the report is disclaimed.

(Herald enters.)

ANOTHER: It's just like a woman

Land of my fathers, Argive earth,  
To be transported in paeans of thanksgiving  
In the light of the tenth year I have returned.  
Before all the facts are known.

ANOTHER: Women are too credulous---

Always jumping to conclusions---  
Quickly spreading rumors  
Which just as quickly die.

CHORUS LEADER: We shall soon know

Whether the flaming succession  
Of torches and signal fires  
Has transmitted truth  
Or a pleasant dream to deceive  
Our minds. I see a herald  
Coming from the beach, his brow



Shaded with olive leaves, and dry dust,  
Clinging to the mud which soils his feet.  
His appearance assures me  
That he shall not be a silent  
Messenger who sends cryptic signals  
From smouldering mountain timbers.  
He will clearly tell us whether  
We should rejoice or---  
But I shall not mention the alternative.  
May the good which we have already seen be increased.

OLD MAN: And may he who prays otherwise for the city  
Reap the fruits of his own sinful heart.

(Herald enters.)

HERALD: Land of my fathers, Argive earth,  
In the light of the tenth year I have returned.  
After all of my hopes have been shattered,  
My last is finally realized; for I never  
Believed that when I died it would be in Argos  
Where I might have a part of this dear land for my tomb.  
Hail to the land and to the light of the sun,  
Hail to Zeus, Most High, and to the Pythian Lord:  
May he no longer hurl his arrows upon us.  
O Lord Apollo, beside Scamandrus you were a  
Bitter foe; now become our savior and heal our wounds.  
I greet you, gods of the marketplace, and Divine Hermes,  
Beloved patron of heralds. May those heroes who  
Sent us from this land welcome with kindness

CHORUS: Is it a love for your fatherland  
We who return safe from battle. O Palace of kings,  
That has exposed your heart?  
Dear and hallowed seat of deities who face the light

HERALD: So great is the love I bear  
Of the sun: look now with joyful eyes upon a king  
That my eyes are wet with tears of happiness.  
Who brings with his return light to dispel darkness

CHORUS: You have suffered, then, from a pleasant disease,  
For you and for all those assembled here.

HERALD: I do not understand what you mean.  
Receive with honor your king, Agamemnon.

CHORUS: You became ill with desire for those  
Welcome him as he deserves to be welcomed:

Who is torn still an equal longing.  
He who brought justice to Troy,  
He who undermined Ilion with the mattock of Zeus.

The people whom we ourselves yearned to see?  
Her altars are dark, her temples destroyed,

CHORUS: So greatly were you missed  
And the seed of her land has perished.

That we grieved within the darkness of our hearts.  
The eldest son of Atreus, our king, who has placed

CHORUS: Why did these anxious thoughts burden your minds?  
The yoke of bondage upon Troy, now returns,

CHORUS: I learned long ago that silence soothes pain.  
A man who above all mortals is worthy of honor

CHORUS: Tell us--What did you fear after the kings had gone?  
And reverence. Neither Paris, nor his Trojan

CHORUS: I shall only say what you said earlier:  
Conspirators, can boast of causing more grief

That death would have been fortunate.  
Than what was received in return.

CHORUS: The long years have ended well, although  
Condemned for rape and theft,

At times our misfortunes equalled our blessings.  
He lost his stolen prize, and brought a flaming end

CHORUS: But you, except the immortal gods, is ever free from sorrow all the  
To his father's house and the land which it ruled.

CHORUS: Days of his life? I could tell you of painful ordeals--  
The sons of Priam have atoned

CHORUS: Cramped quarters aboard ship, rocky harbors, rugged beaches--  
For their sins in double measure.

CHORUS: Our lot was far from happy. But ashore conditions were worse:  
CHORUS: Welcome and rejoice, Herald of the Achaian forces.

CHORUS: We slept outside, near the very walls of Troy,  
HERALD: I accept your greetings with a joy

CHORUS: There was no protection from either the enemy  
That exceeds my desire to die.

CHORUS: From Heaven's midnight dew.  
Our clothes became ragged; our beards and hair,

CHORUS: Is it a love for your fatherland

That has exposed your heart?

HERALD: So great is the love I bear

That my eyes are wet with tears of happiness.

CHORUS: You have suffered, then, from a pleasant disease.

HERALD: I do not understand what you mean.

CHORUS: You became ill with desire for those

Who in turn felt an equal longing.

HERALD: We were missed, then, by our country---

The people whom we ourselves yearned to see?

CHORUS: So greatly were you missed

That we grieved within the darkness of our hearts.

HERALD: Why did these anxious thoughts burden your minds?

CHORUS: I learned long ago that silence soothes pain.

HERALD: Tell me---What did you fear after the kings had gone?

CHORUS: I shall only say what you said earlier:

Even death would have been fortunate.

HERALD: The long years have ended well, although

At times our misfortunes equaled our blessings.

But who, except the immortal gods, is ever free from sorrow all the

Days of his life? I could tell you of painful ordeals---

Cramped quarters aboard ship, rocky harbors, rugged beaches---

Our lot was far from happy. But ashore conditions were worse:

We slept outside, near the very walls of Troy,

Where there was no protection from either the enemy

Or from Heaven's midnight dew.

Our clothes became ragged; our beards and hair,

Tangled and matted, soon resembled that of savage beasts.  
 I could tell you of bitter winters, when snowstorms  
 From Ida killed even the birds; of oppressive summers  
 When the sea slept at midday, waveless, breathless.  
 But why should I complain of past hardships?  
 Our troubles are over---especially for those  
 Who fell in battle, never to rise again;  
 And for us, the surviving Argive soldiers,  
 The ultimate gain outweighs past grief.  
 Why should the living consider those who have perished,  
 Or sorrow for their adverse fate?  
 Let us bid farewell to our misfortunes,  
 And in the light of the sun, boast of our fame  
 Which has sped over land and sea:  
 "The Argive host has captured Troy,  
 And has nailed the spoils upon the temples  
 Of the gods who dwell in Hellas to be an ancient  
 Symbol of glory." For when this report is heard,  
 The city and its generals shall be exalted,  
 And the grace of Zeus who has accomplished this deed,  
 Shall be glorified. Now you have heard my whole story.

CHORUS: At last I believe; your tale has convinced me  
 Of the truth. Old men become youthful through knowledge.  
 But even though I myself am enriched by your report,  
 Klytaimestra and the palace should be informed immediately.

KLYTAIMESTRA: It was long ago when I cried for joy  
 At the sight of the first blazing messenger arriving



At night to announce the capture and destruction of Ilion.  
HERALD: Such a treacherous boast, spoken simply and with  
Then you laughed and reproached me saying:  
Sincerity, is not unbecoming to a lady of noble birth.  
"Do beacon fires persuade you that Troy has been taken?  
CHORUS: That speech was meant for your ears alone.  
Just like a woman---light heart, empty head."  
We are interpreters who understand more clearly.  
You thought I was a fool, dispossessed of my wits.  
But tell us, Herald, how is Menelaos?  
Still I sacrificed; still I sang my songs of praise.  
The powerful one whom this land also loves!  
Until, slowly, one, and then another, and then the entire city  
Has he too won a safe return with you?  
Echoed my strains of triumph; and upon the altars  
HERALD: I cannot dissimule. My friends would find no  
Of the gods, the burning offerings were soothed,  
My is a fair life after a certain length of time.  
And the flames subsided in a fragrant slumber.  
CHORUS: Can you not speak both the truth as well as a  
Why should I listen to your tale?  
Fair report? Truth and good are not easy to conceal  
I shall soon hear it all from the king himself.  
When they have been separated.  
I will hasten now to prepare a welcome befitting  
HERALD: Menelaos and his ship have disappeared  
The honor due my lord's return. For there is no  
Vanished before the eyes of the Achaeans.  
Splendor sweeter to a woman than to see the gates open  
I have not spoken falsely.  
Wide, and her husband returning safe from battle,  
CHORUS: Did he sail away from Ilion alone?  
Spared by the gods. You may take this message to my lord:  
Or did a storm threaten all the ships?  
Bid him return quickly to the city which loves him  
But swept only him away?  
And to his palace where he may find his wife,  
HERALD: With the accuracy of a skillful bowman  
As faithful today as when he left her;  
You have hit the mark! In a few words you have  
For during these long years, she has been as  
Briefly summarized a long and painful tale.  
Loyal and trustworthy as a watch-dog,  
CHORUS: Do the other sailors believe him to be dead  
Gentle to his master, fierce to his enemies.  
Or alive? What was the rumor aboard ship?  
She has neither broken any sealed agreements,  
HERALD: No one is certain of the whole truth.  
Nor blackened her reputation with adulterous pleasures  
Only the sun, who nourishes the earth, knows exactly what occurred.  
During his absence, for she could just as easily be taught  
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To dye bronze as she could learn to love another man.

HERALD: Such a truthful boast, spoken simply and with

Sincerity, is not unbecoming to a lady of noble birth.

CHORUS: That speech was meant for your ears alone;

We are interpreters who understand more clearly.

But tell us, Herald, how is Menelaos,

The powerful one whom this land also loves?

Has he too won a safe return with you?

HERALD: I cannot dissemble. My friends would find no

Joy in a fair lie after a certain length of time.

CHORUS: Can you not speak both the truth as well as a

Fair report? Truth and good are not easy to conceal

When they have been separated.

HERALD: Menelaos and his ship have disappeared---

Vanished before the eyes of the Achaians.

I have not spoken falsely.

CHORUS: Did he sail away from Ilion alone?

Or did a storm threaten all the ships

But swept only him away?

HERALD: With the accuracy of a skillful bowman

You have hit the mark: in a few words you have

Briefly summarized a long and painful tale.

CHORUS: Do the other sailors believe him to be dead

Or alive? What was the rumor aboard ship?

HERALD: No one is certain of the whole truth.

Only the sun, who nourishes the earth, knows exactly what occurred.

CHORUS: Tell me---did the wrath of the gods send the storm?

How did it begin? What was the outcome?

HERALD: This joyful day should not be darkened by a

Tongue that speaks of evil; today the city should

Honor the gods, unburdened by grief. For when a

Grim-faced messenger brings to a city the sorrowful

News of a fallen army, all of the people suffer a

Common wound. Many men are driven from their homes,

Victims of Ares' murderous, double-pointed scourge that

Strikes with a two-fold and bloody curse of slaughter and

Suicide. The messenger who is burdened with such woe,

Should raise his voice to the Erinyes, not to the gods.

But I have come bearing a message of joy, peace and safety

To a happy city. How can I mix the evil with the good

By speaking of that storm which the wrath of the gods sent

Upon the Achaians? For the most bitter of enemies,

Fire and water, formed a league to conspire against

And ruin the wretched Argive army. During the night,

Winds from Thrace blew down upon the fleet, whipping the sea

Into swells that hurled ship against ship, shattering and splitting

The vessels. They tossed and pitched in the surging

Violence, pounded by rain and waves, until the evil,

Twisting shepherd had whirled them into oblivion.

And when the sun arose, in the light of dawn

We saw that the Aegean Sea had blossomed with dead men,

For the flower of the Achaian army floated among the wreckage.



But our ship and hull were intact.  
A god, for no mortal could have prevailed,  
Seized the helm to steal or beg us from death.  
While Fortune, our savior, sat willingly in the ship,  
So that it was neither swamped in anchorage by the breaking surf,  
Nor dashed against the rocky shore.  
And when by dawn's light we discovered  
That we had been spared death by sea, we were incredulous,  
Hardly believing our luck, while we brooded over the  
Fresh sorrows which had left the fleet torn and bruised.  
We thought: "If even one survivor remains from the ships  
Which disappeared in the storm, then he is saying  
That we have all perished." For we, in turn, thought the  
Same of them. But may good luck be with them.  
If the sun's rays find Menelaos yet alive,  
You may expect to see him returning first;  
For Zeus does not wish to destroy his seed.  
There is still hope that he shall return home.  
Now that you have heard my story,  
You know the whole truth.

(Exit Herald.)



Strophe 1

For Wrath, the willing servant of holy Zeus,

What cryptic prophet, knowing her destiny,

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Bestowed this name upon her? What portents of

Destruction led his tongue to name her

Helen---Destroyer of Cities, Slayer

Of Men? The bride of conflict, she left behind

Her curtained safety and sailed away

With Zephyr's aid to Ilion, where

Shield-bearing hunters pursued her across

The traceless, empty paths of the sea. And there,

Upon the verdant banks of the Simoeis,

The countless legions beached their ships to

Spill wine-dark blood in the strife of battle.

Strophe 2  
Antistrophe 1

Then, a man once bred in his home a lian  
For Wrath, the willing servant of holy Zeus,  
Decreed that death and sorrow be mingled with

The joys of marriage, and demanded  
Vengeance befitting the crime. Too loudly  
His kinsmen raised their voices in bridal songs  
To honor him who dishonored sacred laws

Of friendship. Now the Trojan city  
Chants the laments of destruction, dirges  
Which curse the fatal marriage of Paris. Now  
The walls of Priam's city resound with strains

Of grief, and cries of dying men and  
Women still linger to haunt the living.

Nature of his parents, and dined upon his  
Master's sheep, repaying his gratitude with

Slaughter. A Priest of  
Ate, he was sent from the gods to bring a  
Plague of murder, grief and destruction to the  
House which nourished him. With the blood of  
Sheep he defiled it.

Strophe 2  
Strophe 3

Thus, a man once bred in his home a lion  
In like disguise, a spirit of seeming calm  
Cub which had been torn from his mother's breast while  
And peace arrived in Ilion's city. The  
Still unweaned. At first he was tame, delighting

Seriously-gentle ornament of  
Equally young and  
Wealth and the flower of soul-consuming  
Old, who carried him like a new-born infant  
Desire, she, too, deceived her protectors with  
In their arms. Appearing as innocent and  
Her soft, flirtatious eyes. In mid-course she turned,  
Gentle as a child, he would cry to wheedle  
And whirling down upon the sons of  
Food from his master.

Prize, with bitterness consummated  
Her marriage. An avenging Erigone, she  
Was sent by Zeus to bring persecution to  
The city, grief to brides, and evil

Antistrophe 2

When the cub matured he displayed the primal  
Nature of his parents, and dined upon his  
Master's sheep, repaying his gratitude with  
Slaughter. A Priest of  
Ate, he was sent from the gods to bring a  
Plague of murder, grief and destruction to the  
House which nourished him. With the blood of  
Sheep he defiled it.

In like disguise, a spirit of seeming calm

And peace arrived in Ilion's city. The

Serenely-gentle ornament of

Wealth and the flower of soul-consuming

Desire, she, too, deceived her protectors with

Her soft, flirtatious eyes. In mid-course she turned,

And whirling down upon the sons of

Priam, with bitterness consummated

Her marriage. An avenging Erinyes, she

Was sent by Zeus to bring persecution to

The city, grief to brides, and evil

To the transgressors of friendship's decrees.



Strophe 4  
Antistrophe 3

Ancient Hubris always engenders evil

There is an ancient proverb among men which  
Asserts that human wealth, having grown to great  
Proportions, reproduces itself,

Bearing its issue before it dies. It  
Has also been declared that prosperity  
Creates incessant grief. To the contrary, like

However, I believe that only  
Impious actions engender other  
Unrighteous deeds, resembling their forefathers.  
The fortune of a virtuous house is dear,

Antistrophe 4

For its integrity and honor  
Shall be rewarded with righteous children.  
Justice honors men who live righteously, and  
With a glow, illumines their lowly, smoke-filled  
Houses. With downcast eyes, she avoids the gilded

Mansions of men whose  
Hands are foul with sin. For she scorns the strength of  
Gold imprinted with the distinctive marks of  
Falseness. Justice guides the affairs of men to  
Final fulfillment.

Strophe 4

Ancient Hubris always engenders evil  
Pride and arrogance in the hearts of wicked  
Men. For when its fatal predestined hour of  
Rebirth arrives, it  
Springs to life, a Demon invincible and  
Impious, disfiguring every hall with  
Black contention, curses against the house like  
Those of its fathers.

Antistrophe 4

Justice honors men who live righteously, and  
With a glow, illumines their lowly, smoke-filled  
Homes. With downcast eyes, she avoids the gilded  
Mansions of men whose  
Hands are foul with sin. For she scorns the strength of  
Gold imprinted with the distinctive marks of  
Falsehood. Justice guides the affairs of men to  
Final fulfillment.

(Agamemnon enters in  
a chariot; Cassandra  
follows.)

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Welcome, King, Destroyer of Troy,  
Descendant of Atreus!  
How shall I address you,  
How shall I honor you without exceeding  
The limitations of praise due a mortal,  
Or falling short of the praise worthy of your deeds?  
Men too frequently honor a false representation  
Rather than its reality, thereby transgressing  
The ideals of Right and Wrong. For men will  
Grieve with those who suffer, while their own  
Hearts remain untouched by the sharp stings of sorrow.  
Likewise, when others are happy,  
Men force their lips to smile,  
Pretending joy which they do not feel.  
But a good judge of character can never be deceived  
By eyes that only feign the tears of love and friendship.  
Thus, I will not conceal this from you:  
When you dispatched the army to avenge Helen,  
It was engraved on my heart that your mind had been  
Led astray to sacrifice foolishly the lives of men  
In her behalf. But now, with the love that is  
Deep in my heart, I welcome you. Your labor has  
ended in joy. Ask everyone, and in time,  
You shall know who was just and who was wicked  
Among the citizens who remained to guard the city.

AGAMEMNON: My greetings first to Argos

And to the gods who dwell in this land,  
For it was they who enabled me to exact  
Vengeance upon the city of Priam and  
Return home safely. They did not heed  
The unjust prayers of men; but without hesitation  
Cast their votes for Troy's destruction into  
The bloody urn of murder. And while Hope hovered  
Above the other urn, no hand filled it with an  
Opposing vote. The captured city can still be recognized:  
Although the first violent tempest of doom has passed,  
Smouldering, dying embers continue to fill the air  
With the smoke of burning wealth. We must always  
Honor the gods with praise and remembrance.  
For with their help we enclosed the city in our net.  
To avenge a woman the Horse of Argos gave birth  
To its bestial young to grind to dust the city of Troy.  
For when the Pleiades set, the armored host leaped  
Like a savage lion over the towers of Ilion to devour  
The flesh and drink the blood of kings.  
This prelude I extend to the gods.  
But I have not forgotten the thoughts  
Which you spoke from your heart.  
I agree with you:  
Few men will honor a friend's good fortune  
Without being jealous themselves.



It is not inherent in their natures.  
When the wicked poison of envy siezes a man's heart,  
The pain of his own disease and sorrow  
Is intensified and made heavier to bear  
When he sees the prosperity of others.  
I speak from knowledge, for I know men who are  
Only the mirrored reflections of friendship,  
Only a shadow's ghost, men who have seemed to be  
My friends. Only Odysseus, who was at first  
Unwilling to sail with me, was always my faithful  
Friend and companion----whether he is now dead or alive  
As I speak to you.  
We shall soon call the assembly together  
To discuss those matters which pertain  
To the city and to the gods. Plans that are  
Good we shall keep; those that should be remedied  
We shall either cauterize or amputate with good  
Intentions to curb their infectious disease.

At last I am home---

My palace, my hearth!

I greet the gods who

Sent me forth and who have

Granted my safe return.

Victory has been mine,

And may it forever be.

Is raising him. He forewarned me of your danger  
KLYTAIMESTRA: Men of the city, elder statesmen of Argos,

I am not ashamed to speak of my love for my husband.

For in time a woman's timidity fades.

We have heard the others' reports;

But now I shall tell you of my own miserable

Existence during the long years he was in Troy.

To remain at home apart from her husband

Is a heavy burden for a woman to bear alone,

When each rumor that is heard brings a new

Report of disaster, each sorrow worse than the last,

Rending the house with cries.

Indeed, if this man had suffered wounds

As numerous as the reports which poured into the house,

Then he would be more pierced with holes than a net.

And had he died as many times as were reported,

Then he would be as triple-bodied Geryon the second,

And dying once for each body,

Could boast of having many cloaks of triple-layered

Earth above him, not to speak of that beneath.

Because of these adverse reports,

Others released me, many times against my will,

From the strangling noose about my neck.

For these reasons, our child, Orestes,

The pledge of our love and faith, is not with us here,

As he should be. Do not be alarmed,

For our kind and firm friend, Strophios the Phocian,

Your foot on the earth, O King, Triumpher of Troy.

Is raising him. He forewarned me of your danger  
In Troy and of the ensuing disaster should the  
Lawless clamor of anarchy overthrow the Council of Elders.  
For it is inherent in men  
To kick again the fallen man.  
I do not bear this as an excuse for trickery.  
The rushing fountain of my tears is dry;  
There is not one drop left.  
For I have harmed my eyes with weeping  
For you and for the unneglected fires.  
And when I slept, even the faint rustlings  
Of a buzzing gnat would awaken me. In my dreams,  
I saw you suffer more wounds than you could have  
Possibly received during the time I was asleep.  
But now I dare all things, for my mind has been freed  
From mourning. I hail this man, the protector of the house,  
As the saving forestay of a ship, the sustaining pillar  
Of the loftiest roof, and as a father would hail his  
Only-born son. For appearing as land to sailors who  
Have lost all hope, his coming is as welcome as a  
Beautiful day after a storm, or a stream of spring  
Water for the thirsty traveler.  
It is a relief to escape the burdens of necessity.  
I deem him worthy of such salutations.  
Let envy be absent, for we have endured many evils.  
And now, beloved husband,  
Come down from that chariot, but do not place  
Your foot on the earth, O King, Trampler of Troy.

Women! Why do you delay? For it was commanded not to do this?  
As your task to adorn his path with tapestries.  
At once, let it be strewn with purple,  
For justice has granted him a return to the home  
Which he never expected to see.  
My care remains unconquered by sleep;  
For with the help and justice of the gods,  
I shall arrange for what is destined.

AGAMEMNON: Daughter of Leda, guardian of my home,

You have prolonged your speech in proportion to my absence.  
Just praise, however, is the prerogative of others.  
Neither adore me in the manner of women,  
Making obeisance to me with your cries,  
Nor prostrate yourself upon the earth as a barbarian.  
Honor me as a man, not as a god.  
For I fear, that being mortal,  
I shall be made liable to envy if I tread  
Upon these embroidered rugs which carpet my path.  
Only the gods should be honored in this way.  
Footcloths are of a different nature from embroidered  
Tapestries; for the latter are objects of rumor.  
Not to be presumptuous is the greatest gift of Zeus,  
For one must deem happy only the man who ends his life  
In dear tranquility. If I may do so, then I shall be  
Of good courage.

KLYTAEMLSTRA: What you say is contrary to the general opinion.

AGAMEMNON: You shall not shake my good judgement.



KLYTAIMESTRA: Fearing the gods, did you ever vow not to do this?

AGAMEMNON: I might have, had someone prophesied its fulfillment.

KLYTAIMESTRA: What do you think Priam would do,  
Had he accomplished the deeds which you have?

AGAMEMNON: It seems to me that he certainly would tread

Upon the embroidered carpets.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Then do not fear the censure of men.

AGAMEMNON: But the voice of the people is powerful.

KLYTAIMESTRA: But he who is unenvied is not even admired.

AGAMEMNON: It is not womanly to argue.

KLYTAIMESTRA: It is not right for those who have been

Blessed not to yield.

AGAMEMNON: Why do you want to win this disagreement?

KLYTAIMESTRA: Yield; be willing to let me have my way.

AGAMEMNON: All right...If this is what you want,

Let someone quickly untie my shoes. As I tread

Upon the purple robes of the gods,

Let no one shoot me from afar with the envy of his eyes.

For it is a disgrace to spoil with my feet

The costly woven treasures of my house.

But enough of this. Graciously accept into the house

This foreign woman. Zeus is kind to

The master who rules gently,

For no one willingly bears the yoke of slavery.

She has traveled with me here, a gift of the army,

Selected as a chosen flower from among great wealth.

And now, since I am prevailed upon by your speech,

I shall enter the halls of my home, treading on purples.

KLYTAIMESTRA: There is the sea, and who shall drain it dry?

It is worth its weight in silver,

An ever-renewing source of countless

Rugs dyed with its crimson.

The house does not know poverty, King,

For the gods have willingly given it a store of these.

Had the oracles prophesied that rugs would procure

A ransom to save your life, I would have vowed many

To tread upon. For while the root exists, foliage comes

To the house, stretching over it a shade from the dog star.

Witness as I to their recent return:

Spirit and soul free within me sing

The walyric laments of Erinyes, since all faith,

Hope and belief now no longer remain. My heart,

Though it is undeceived, is alarmed

That my dreadful, intuitive fears may be true.

May these, my suspicions be false, I pray,

And unfulfilled, it still is darkness.

Why does this fear, so persistent and dread,  
 Haunt and command my prophetic soul?  
 For, unbidden, unwelcome, my chant divinely sings.  
 Neither can judgement renounce it as occult dreams,  
 Nor can courage hold reign in my heart.  
 For that time when ship cables were anchored on sand,  
 That time when the armies set sail for Troy,  
 Is long, long past.

## Antistrophe 1

Witness am I to their recent return:  
 Spirit and soul from within me sing  
 The unlyric laments of Erinyes, since all faith,  
 Hope and belief now no longer remain. My heart,  
 Though it is undeceived, is alarmed  
 That my dreadful, intuitive fears may be true.  
 May these, my suspicions be false, I pray,  
 And unfulfilled. In grief and in darkness, I

Strophe 2

One insatiate, verging boundary separates  
Health and prosperity, illness and need.  
If Destiny batters a man  
Upon its invisible reefs,  
With unerring cast he hurls his cargo  
Into the sea to prevent his family  
And ship from sinking beneath the ponderous load,  
While year after year the harvested gifts of Zeus  
Provide abundant recompense,  
Defeating famine's contagion.

Antistrophe 2

When the life-giving, scarlet blood of a mortal once  
Falls to the earth, incantations are vain.  
For he who gave life to the dead,  
Was scourged and disabled by Zeus.  
Were it not ordained by holy creeds that  
Fate must exact retribution for human  
Excess, my heart would have prompted my tongue to speak.  
But deep in my heart, in grief and in darkness, I  
No longer hope to quench the flames  
That stir and trouble my spirit.



KLYTAIMESTRA: *Kassandra, you may come down from the*

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*Chariot and enter the house, since the grace of Zeus*

*Has permitted you to share in our sacred water and*

*Worship at the household altar with the other slaves.*

*Come down from the chariot, She listens to nothing*

*And do not be so proud. Having left her ruined home,*

*It is said that even the son of Alkmena was sold*

*Into slavery and ate the bread of bondsmen.*

*A slave's lot is easy to bear when the house*

*Which he serves has been blessed with ancient wealth.*

*It is the master who reaps unexpected riches (Exit Klytaimestra.)*

*Who is cruel to his slaves by every standard.*

*CHORUS: I am not angry with you,*

*But you may expect to receive here what is customary.*

*For I pity your lot.*

CHORUS: The queen has spoken plainly to you.

*Leave the chariot, wretched girl.*

Now that Fate has ensnared you in its net,

*Submit; bear the yoke of necessity.*

Obey her if you can.

*Strophe 1*

KLYTAIMESTRA: Unless her language is barbarian,

*Kassandra: Sorrow on earth!*

As foreign as the swallow's song,

*Apollon! Apollon!*

She must understand me...and obey.

*CHORUS: Why do you supplicate Loxias?*

CHORUS: Her advice is good;

*He does not heed those who mourn.*

Obey it and leave the chariot seat.

*Antistrophe 1*

KLYTAIMESTRA: I do not have time to waste on her.

*Kassandra: Sorrow on earth!*

The lambs wait at the central hearth,

*Apollon! Apollon!*

Ready to be sacrificed in honor of this joyous day

*CHORUS: Again her cries of ill-omen name*

Which we never expected to see.

*The god to whom cries is no concern.*

Do not delay if you plan to obey my commands.

Even if you do not understand my speech,  
Make a sign, or gesture with your foreign hand.

CHORUS: This strange woman needs a skillful  
Interpreter; she acts like a captured beast.

KLYTAIMESTRA: She is mad. She listens to nothing  
But her own evil thoughts. Having left her ruined home,  
She will not learn to bear the bit  
Until she has foamed away her strength in blood.  
I will not disgrace myself by wasting  
More words on her contempt.

(Exit Klytaimestra.)

CHORUS: I am not angry with you,  
For I pity your lot.  
Leave the chariot, wretched girl.  
Submit; bear the yoke of necessity.

Strophe 1

KASSANDRA: Sorrow on earth!

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Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS: Why do you supplicate Loxias?

He does not heed those who mourn.

Antistrophe 1

KASSANDRA: Sorrow on earth!

Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS: Again her cries of ill-omen name

The god to whom grief is no concern.

Strophe 2  
Strophe 3

KASSANDRA: Apollo, Apollo!

Lord of the Ways, Way to Death!

Spilt---Horror---Shedding of kindred blood---

Again you have ruined me,

Walls---Floors that reek from blood---

This time, utterly.

CHORUS: I think that she is prescient of

Following a scent of blood

Some impending evil.

That reveals death.

Although she is enslaved,

She speaks with divine inspiration.

Antistrophe 3

Antistrophe 2

KASSANDRA: Oh, see! Witness the proof!

Antistrophe 2

These weeping children slain---Their flesh torn,

KASSANDRA: Apollo, Apollo!

Lord of the Ways, Way to Death!

Where have you led me? Whose home,

Whose domain is this?

CHORUS: If you do not know, I can tell

You: it is the house of

The sons of Atreus. I

Have not spoken falsely. It is true.

Strophe 4

Strophe 3

KASSANDRA: Oh, Lord! What is her scheme?

KASSANDRA: House hated by the gods!

Guilt---Horror---Shedding of kindred blood---

Nets---Floors that reek from blood---

CHORUS: This strange girl is like a hound

Following a scent of blood

That reveals death.

Antistrophe 3

Antistrophe 4

KASSANDRA: Oh, see! Witness the proof!

Those weeping children slain---Their flesh torn,

Roasted---Their father's feast.

CHORUS: We had heard before of your

Prophetic fame, but we do

Not want prophets here.

CHORUS: I do not understand: first she speaks riddles---then

His, cloudy prophecies that bewilder me.



Strophe 4

KASSANDRA: Oh, Lord! What is her scheme?

What new outrage is she plotting  
Within the house? Unbearable evil  
For the beloved. No help, no escape!  
Rescue is so far away.

CHORUS: I do not understand these latter prophecies.

The first I could grasp for the whole town speaks them.

Antistrophe 4

KASSANDRA: Evil woman! Is this

The welcome you shall give the man  
Who has shared your bed? A bath to cleanse him?  
How can I speak the end? So quickly, hands  
Extended---groping---grasping!

CHORUS: I do not understand: first she speaks riddles---then

Dim, cloudy prophecies that bewilder me.

Strophe 5

KASSANDRA: Alas! It is clear!

A net of death!

But the snare is the woman---

Partner in bed, partner in murder.

Now let the rapacious fury of the house

Scream for sacrifice and death.

CHORUS: Why do you call upon the Erinyes

To voice their vengeful cries against the house?

Your words blacken my hope,

And cause my blood to flow in pale

And lifeless drops, as if

The fatal hour of death had come upon me,

The sunset of life.

KASSANDRA: Oh! My own wretched fate!

KASSANDRA: See! Look there! Protect

The bull from his

Mate. Oh! He is caught in a

Tangle of webs. Deep she gores with her

Black horn. He falls into the bath---crimson now---

O Murderous treachery!

CHORUS: I cannot boast of being a skillful

Interpreter of oracles, yet what

She says clearly forbodes

Evil. Still, prophets never predict

Good. Their craft speaks only

Through tangles of evil to frighten those who hear

Their devious words.

Oh! sweet nightingale! The gods have

Given her wings and a pure voice

To sing and never weep.

And for us there waits a sharp, cutting sword.

What has inspired this vain torrent

Of anguish and tears? Why do

You chant songs of ill-omen

And terror, the piercing strains of grief? Who has

Ordered that your speech must

Follow only

The paths prophetic of sorrow?

Strophe 6

KASSANDRA: Oh! My own wretched fate!

I sing of pain for me alone, death for beloved men:

To overflow this cup of grief.

Why have you led me here?

Only to die, only to die with him.

CHORUS: You are possessed, by god or madness,

To chant your own death lament,

Like the tawny nightingale

Who grieves forever with cries of "Itys, Itys."

For from her wretched heart,

She mourns a fate

That blossoms only with sorrow.

Antistrophe 6

KASSANDRA: If only to have her

Fate---sweet nightingale! The gods have

Given her wings and a pure voice

To sing and never weep.

But for me there waits a sharp, cutting sword.

CHORUS: What has inspired this vain torrent

Of anguish and tears? Why do

You chant songs of ill-omen

And terror, the piercing strains of grief? Who has

Ordained that your speech must

Follow only

The paths prophetic of sorrow?



KASSANDRA: O Marriage of Paris, death for beloved men:

O Streams of Scamandrus,

Water my fathers drank:

I, too, as a child, was nourished

Upon your banks. But now beside

Kokytos and Acheron

I soon shall wail my prophetic songs.

CHORUS: Even a child could understand these words---

They are all too clear.

Sorrow pierces my heart,

Ripping and tearing with bloody fangs.

It trembles and breaks---for your song,

Your fate are bitter.

KASSANDRA: My prophecies shall no longer hide their Antistrophe 73

Teeth behind a veil like a newly-married bride.

KASSANDRA: O My sorrowful city, laden with pain and

Death---at last completely

Destroyed. Flocks of pastured

Lambs my father slaughtered to save

The walls---no avail---no relief

From suffering. And I, too,

My soul burning with fever, shall die.

CHORUS: From first to last your words are dark. What force,

Divine and cruel,

Has burdened you with thoughts

Of evil, compelling this mournful

Chant of pain? For, unlike you, I

Can foresee no end.

He dashed against that first, ancient sin.

And by one, they spurn and curse the

Man who defiled his brother's bed.

Was my aim wide, or did I hit the mark?

Am I a fraud who conjures lies

To peddle from door to door?

Be a witness by your oath that I know

The legendary guilt of this house.

CHORUS: How could an oath, a bond of honor,

Be of any help? Yet, I marvel at you!

Having been raised in that foreign city beyond the sea,

KASSANDRA: My prophecies shall no longer hide their

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Truth behind a veil like a newly-married bride.

For sorrow, much greater than mine,

Shall swell and spill like a breaking wave

That is dashed by the wind toward the rising sun.

I shall not speak in cryptic riddles.

Follow me now to witness as I scent

This trail of crimes committed long ago.

Within the house abides a choir that sings

With one harsh, discordant voice.

Their chant is evil.

Made bold and drunk on the wine of human blood,

They cannot be expelled---never will they leave.

Vengeful spirits! Reveling, drunken band of Erinyes!

They lurk within the hall, chanting hymns

Of hatred against that first, ancient sin.

One by one, they spurn and curse the

Man who defiled his brother's bed.

Was my aim wide, or did I hit the mark?

Am I a fraud who conjures lies

To peddle from door to door?

Bear witness by your oath that I know

The legendary guilt of this house.

CHORUS: How could an oath, a bond of honor,

Be of any help? Yet, I marvel at you!

Having been raised in that foreign city beyond the sea,

How could speak with accuracy of things

You have never heard or seen?

KASSANDRA: I know such things through divination,

Apollo's gift to me.

CHORUS: Was it a god's gift of love? Did he desire you?

KASSANDRA: Yes...There was a time when

I was ashamed to admit it.

CHORUS: They who prosper are always delicate about their vanity.

KASSANDRA: He wrestled with me.

His breath was sweet; his form, graceful.

CHORUS: Did you beget a child?

KASSANDRA: No. I lied, promising that I would yield,

Only to deceive Loxias.

CHORUS: Did you possess the gift of prophecy

Before you deceived him?

KASSANDRA: Yes. I prophesied even then of sorrow

Destined for my city.

CHORUS: And Loxias was not angry?

Did he not punish you for your sin?

KASSANDRA: Oh, yes. I suffered.

Since that time no one has ever believed my prophecies.

CHORUS: But all that you have foretold seems to be true.

KASSANDRA: It returns---It returns!

O twisting, whirling tempest of madness!

Insufferable prelude of true divination!

See---there---beside the house---



Small, young forms that hover like shadows in dreams---  
 Children murdered by those most dear, *hysterics' feast---*  
 Holding in their hands their own flesh and hearts!  
 Piteous banquet for a father to taste! *once more.*  
 Hear me! Vengeance for this has taken the shape  
 Of a spiritless lion who crouches in my master's bed,  
 Lying in wait for his return.  
 Yes, my master, my enslaver! *all speak plainly.*  
 Mighty lord of the ships that carried death to Ilion!  
 Yet, now, ignorance renders him helpless  
 Against that beguiling bitch who smiles,  
 Fauns and licks his hand. *with healing words of peace.*  
 But when at last she strikes, her bite is furtive  
 And deadly. *not let it be so....*  
 What shall I call this bold woman who dares  
 To kill a man? Loathful beast? Two-faced viper?  
 Or Skylla monster who haunts the shore to prey upon men?  
 Dark mother of Hades! Implacable, contentious spirit,  
 Breathing hateful curses against her own!  
 Audacious woman! How she exulted! *ed scheme.*  
 With what pretense of joy she greeted his safe return,  
 Cheering and shouting like man who has routed the enemy  
 In battle. But whether or not you believe me,  
 I no longer care. What is now the future,  
 Shall soon be the present; and you who stand here  
 Shall weep with pity for these prophecies of truth.

CHORUS: I know the legend of which she speaks,  
And although the tale is ancient of Thyestes' feast---  
The banquet served from his children's flesh---  
My heart grows cold to hear its truth once more.  
But as for these other omens,  
I have lost their scent,  
And wander far from the trail.

KASSANDRA: Then listen: I shall speak plainly.  
You shall behold Agamemnon dead.

CHORUS: Peace, wretched girl.  
Silence your lips.

KASSANDRA: I cannot speak with healing words of peace.

CHORUS: If this is to be...

O Lord! Do not let it be so....

KASSANDRA: While you are praying,

They are plotting death.

CHORUS: Who is the man who plans this wicked deed?

KASSANDRA: Man? You have misunderstood my prophecy.

CHORUS: Perhaps...for I could not follow your  
Description of the murderer's twisted scheme.

KASSANDRA: But I speak the Greek tongue---

Perhaps, all too well.

CHORUS: The Pythian oracles are Greek, too,  
Yet difficult to grasp.

KASSANDRA: O Flame of searing fire! O Lykeian Apollo!  
Returning to me once again---  
Bringing pain and sorrow!

See---See---The lioness who stalks  
Upon two feet, who sleeps with the wolf  
While her noble lion is far away.  
Pitiless woman! She will kill me,  
Mixing my death into the vial  
That holds the vengeful poison of her wrath.  
Boasting, she sharpens her blade of death  
For a husband who dared. For the gods have sworn  
To bring a mistress home.  
Why do I wear these garlands about my neck,  
Or carry this staff of prophecy?  
They only serve to mock me.  
Fall---Break---Be ruined before I, too,  
Am ruined by my fate, and dying follow you.  
Grant to some other woman your wealth of sorrow.  
It is Apollo himself who has stripped me  
Of my prophetic robes.  
He watched as those I held most dear  
Mocked and hated me for wearing his orders.  
With one voice they called me  
Gypsy, starving beggar, cheat.  
I have endured it all for this prophet,  
Who has brought to pass that I, his prophetess,  
Shall die here.  
I shall not be slain at my father's altar;  
But upon the executioner's block,

My hot, sacrificial blood shall be shed.

Together we must die, but not without honor  
From the gods.

For a son shall come to slay his mother  
And avenge his father's murder.

An outcast, wandering in exile from his home, such pain.

He shall return to crest the waves of sin and ruinate

That break upon the house. For the gods have sworn

That his father's fallen corpse shall lead him home. a mortal.

But why should I grieve, weeping for him---

I who witnessed the death they brought to Troy?

For they who destroyed the city (She moves toward the palace

Shall fare as Ilion fared, but turns back.)

Being judged in accordance with divine decrees.

I, too, shall accept my fate.

O Gates of Hades, hear my prayer:

May the blow be quick and true,

A painless death---without a struggle.

And as my life-blood ebbs,

May I close my eyes in peace.

CHORUS: O Piteous, wise woman, blood.

You have said many things. sacrificing at the hearth.

Yet, if you do know your fate, ...

Why do you calmly approach it

Like a lamb driven to the altar of Zeus?

KASSANDRA: Friends, there is no escape now.



CHORUS: Gain time! Flee!

To prolong the little time that is left  
Is often sweet.

KASSANDRA: My day has come. To flee

Would be of little gain.

CHORUS: You are a courageous woman to endure such pain.

KASSANDRA: Only those who are unhappy and misfortunate  
Ever hear such praise.

CHORUS: To die nobly can bring happiness and grace to a mortal.

KASSANDRA: My father! You were noble

And your sons were brave. Oh!

(She moves toward the palace  
but turns back.)

CHORUS: What is it?

Why do you recoil in fear?

KASSANDRA: O Foul horror!

CHORUS: Why do you cry?

The foulness and horror which you see

Are only in your mind.

KASSANDRA: The house breathes

The odor of death and dripping blood.

CHORUS: Why not? They are sacrificing at the hearth.

KASSANDRA: The breath of tombs....

CHORUS: Syrian frankincense?

Is this what you smell?

KASSANDRA: I shall enter the house,

Mourning as I go,

Mine and Agamemon's fate. sorrow,

Enough! Let my life be ended.

O Friends, the terror that beats

At my heart is not vain like the

Flutterings of birds who fear the bush.

When I am dead, bear witness to my truth:

A woman shall be slain for me, a woman; saying:

A man shall fall for the man

Whose wife was evil.

This I ask in friendship

As I go to my death.

CHORUS: Wretched girl. for the blood that was shed?

I pity the fate which you have foreseen.

KASSANDRA: I wish to speak a final word,

And sing a final song---my threnody of death:

O Light of the sun, pain-

Last light I see, Grief?

Hear my prayers:

Let the avenger of these murders

Also remember me--- striking deep!

An easy thing to kill, a slave,

A simple woman.

Sad, sad world of men!

Your joy is only a shadow

Sketched upon life---

A painting easily blotted

Closely With the tears of sorrow.

The sadness of life--- and protection...

More painful than death. (The old men are confused)

(Exit Cassandra.)

CHORUS: The hearts of men are never satisfied. (Indicated.)

For when Prosperity knocks at the door, sound the alarm---

There is no one who will drive her away, saying:

"Depart. No longer enter here." Break into the palace---

The blessed gods have granted to our king drip with blood!

All the glory due to the captor of Troy,

And safe sailing to speed him home again.

But, must he now atone for the blood that was shed?

Must he, too, bleed for those long years

So that the dead may be avenged? berating,

Who is the man, who, hearing this,

Can boast of living free from pain---

Safe---secure from the Demon, Grief? est;

Someone, we should act as well as plan. (A cry is heard from

the palace.)

AGAMEMNON: O Fatal blow! Death striking deep!

CHORUS: Silence! Who cried out? silence? Live in submission?

Who screams of death within the house? pution to this house?

AGAMEMNON: Again! Oh! to die then to endure that.

CHORUS LEADER: That was the voice of our king. master.

The deed is done. have no proof that our lord is dead.

Quickly...We must take counsel---not prophete---

Closely...Stand together---

We need a plan of safety and protection.

(The old men are confused  
and distracted, each speak-  
ing separately as indicated.)

OLD MAN: I think that the herald should sound the alarm---

Call the citizens to assemble here, then---

ANOTHER: No! Now is the time to act! Break into the palace---

Seize them---Now, while their swords still drip with blood!

ANOTHER: I agree with you---Act quickly---

Do not delay---No time to waste---

ANOTHER: It is clear to see what they propose;

These first steps shall lead to tyranny.

ANOTHER: While we waste time deliberating,

They shall glory in deeds of action.

Their hands are busy, not their tongues.

ANOTHER: I do not know what plan is best;

However, we should act as well as plan.

ANOTHER: I think so too. Words will not restore

The dead to life.

ANOTHER: Must we suffer then in silence? Live in submission?

Yield to rulers who have brought corruption to this house?

ANOTHER: No! Better to die than to endure that.

Compared to such tyranny, Death is a gentle master.

ANOTHER: Wait! We have no proof that our lord is dead.

All we heard was a cry. We are not prophets---



ANOTHER: True. Our decisions should be made from

Knowledge, not conjecture. Then our wrath will be just.

LEADER: At last we agree. Let us first learn

What has happened to the son of Atreus.

And then I struck!

I struck him twice

and twice he cried in pain....

and then he simply crumpled, a broken body.

Upon the floor where I stabbed him once again

(As they approach the palace, the

doors open to reveal the bodies

of Agamemnon and Cassandra.

Klytaimestra stands over them.)

KLYTAIMESTRA: I am not ashamed to contradict

The statements which I made earlier:

They served my purpose well.

There was no other way to ensnare of blood,

Him in my web of ruin---

No other way to entangle that the earth,

Hateful man in my closely-woven nets---

Except to tell him lies

And assume a guise of love.

I have been planning this for years,

Long, bitter years

Filled with bitter thoughts---

Ended at last! Here and now! Where I stand!

I have struck him down!

I am proud of the deed;

I do not deny it.

There was no escape, no flight for him---

He was defenseless:

Caught like a fish in a net!

I encircled him with many robes,

Fatal webs to hold him tight---

And then I struck!

I struck him twice

And twice he cried in pain....

And then he simply crumpled, a broken body,

Upon the floor where I stabbed him once again

In gratitude and reverence to Zeus,

Lord of the Dead beneath the earth.

And as he gasped his final breath,

I was splashed with dark-red drops of blood,

A crimson sea of death---

But as sweet to me as dew is to the earth,

And as precious as spring rain from Zeus

When buds begin to bloom.

Elders of Argos,

Now that you have heard

What has been done,

You may rejoice if you wish.

As for me---

I glory in my deed!

Were it sanctioned to pour

Libations over the dead,

How fitting, how very fitting

It would be to pour one over him!

For at last he has swallowed the dregs of that cup  
Which he filled with evil for us to drink.

If you can usurp my power,

Strophe 1

CHORUS: O Woman! Wait and you may rule.

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What evil thing--- intend it to be otherwise,

What poisonous herb grown on the earth,  
Or dregs of slime from the drifting sea  
Did you savor

To whet your desire for murder,  
And make you a thing to be cursed?

As he was cut and cast down,

You, too, shall be---

For hated by a bitter people,

Homeless, friendless you must leave.

KLYTAEIMESTRA: Why should I be condemned?

Why should I be exiled from the city,

Despised and cursed by the people,

When you never dared to judge this man?

His pastures were filled with countless sheep

When he sacrificed his own daughter,

Dearest child of my travail.

And why? To charm the winds of Thrace!

For all he cared---she could have been a beast.

Why did you not banish him from this land?

He was stained with guilt.

Yet, now, when you hear what I have done,

Your judgment is severe.

Now listen closely:

Threaten what you like.

If you can usurp my power,

Then I shall submit and you may rule.

But if the gods intend it to be otherwise,

Believe me, though you are old,

I shall teach you to be discreet.

Antistrophe 1

CHORUS: Bold woman!

Proud are your thoughts!

Impudent, your words! They are tokens

Of a frenzied mind that drips with the

Blood of slaughter.

Blazoned on your brow for all to see,

Your deed has left its crimson stain.

Branded with disgrace and shame,

You shall atone

For each blow; and losing all that you

Hold dear, you shall pay in full.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Listen to me now, for

The oath which I swear is holy. By the

Vengeance exacted for my child's

Death, and by Ate and Erinys to

Whom I sacrificed this man, I swear

That I never expect fear to tread



My halls while my faithful friend,  
Aigisthos, kindles the fire  
Upon my hearth. He is a strong shield  
For my courage; while the man who abused  
And wronged me, lies here---  
The whimsey of every Chryseis  
At Troy. With him lies his  
Captive paramour,  
His sibyl consort,  
Who shared the galley benches at  
His side. They deserve their fate. As he  
Lies there, she who sang her swan-song, her death lament,  
Is cradled beside his fond  
Heart. Ah! Sweet dreams for me tonight!

Strophe 2

CHORUS: O Death!

Do not linger  
But come quickly,  
Bringing to us eternal sleep  
Without pain or suffering.  
For our Lord,  
Our dear defense,  
Is dead---  
Who, for a woman's cause,  
Endured long years of pain and stress  
Only to be slain at last  
By another woman's hate.

O Helen,  
Two children, the offspring of  
Capricious spirit,  
Tantalus.  
You alone destroyed  
You have placed your  
The countless men  
POW!  
Who fought beside  
In the hands and hearts of  
The walls of Troy.  
Woman who wield it with a  
Crimson flower!  
Strength equal to yours, and whose  
You are a legend,  
Dread have pierced my heart with grief.  
A stain of blood,  
Perching there,  
That will never fade.  
Over his body.  
Now within this house  
She exults--proudly  
Strife walks again,  
Beating at the  
Bringing death and grief.  
Wailing, screaming

KLYTAIMESTRA: Be not so oppressed  
By the burdens of your fate  
That you pray for your death.  
Neither vent your bitter wrath  
On Helen. She, alone, did not  
Destroy so many Danaan men,  
Or inflict this fatal wound,  
This sorrow that shall never heal.

Antistrophe 2

CHORUS: Spirit has glutted  
Of Evil! You with the blood of  
Have descended is he who imbues  
Upon this house and upon its

heart, so that before the old  
Wound heals, a new begins to bleed.

Two children, the offspring of  
Tantalos.

You have placed your  
Power  
In the hands and hearts of  
Women who wield it with a  
Strength equal to yours, and whose  
Deeds have pierced my heart with grief.

Perching there,  
Over his body,  
She exults---proudly  
Boasting of the  
Murder. Screaming  
Like a bird of  
Prey, at the sight  
Of carrion flesh,  
She chants your strains,  
Your songs of discord,  
Tuneless lyrics of  
Blood and death.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Your lips are correct.

It is the spirit whom you  
Have named who has glutted  
Himself thrice with the blood of  
This race. It is he who imbues  
A thirst for blood deep within the  
Heart, so that before the old  
Wound heals, a new begins to bleed.

CHORUS: Bitter tale of a wrathful demon's

Hatred for this house;  
Blind spirits, never sated,  
Haunt these halls with sorrow.  
Zeus! Zeus!

You are the cause!

Everything begins with you,  
For what you will is done.  
Nothing in this world of mortals  
Can remain unsanctioned by your laws.

My King, my King!

How shall I mourn you,  
Or speak of my love?  
You lie, ensnared in a web  
Of shameful death,  
A spider's woven lair.  
For the hand that wielded  
The twin-edged sword  
Belonged to her---  
Your treacherous queen.

KLYTAIMESTRA: What? You say that

I have done this deed?  
But I am not Agamemnon's queen.  
In the shape of his wife  
Lurks the ancient avenger  
Of this house.



He has slain this man

To atone for the feast

Which Atreus made,

A payment of blood

For slaughtered children.

Antistrophe 3

CHORUS: You---Guiltless? Who shall witness that your

Hands are pure and clean?

Yet, the avenging fiend of

His father's blood has helped:

Ares,

The Black Ruin,

Who forces his way through the

Flowing streams of kindred

Blood, strides at last to seek vengeance

For a father gorged with his children's flesh.

My King, my King!

How shall I mourn you,

Or speak of my love?

You lie, ensnared in a web

Of shameful death,

A spider's woven lair.

For the hand that wielded

The twin-edged sword

Belonged to her---

Your treacherous queen.

KLYTAIMESTRA: No! It was his

Own deceit which caused

His death and destroyed his house. Lovely

Flower! Iphigeneia!

Bitter tears I shed for you.

But now he

Has received in turn

All the pain he dealt. For

By the sword with

Which he murdered, he

Has paid his debt.

Strophe 4

CHORUS: Confused, bewildered,

My thoughts wander---

The house is falling,

Where should I turn?

I fear the storm---

Beating, driving drops of blood---

Thunderbolts that shake the walls---

While at the stone

Fate sits

And sharpens the blade of Terror

O Earth! Would that you had

Embraced me long ago,

So that I had never seen

My king lie slain,

Murdered in a silver bath.

Who shall bury him? Who shall mourn him?

You? Will you dare it?

You who dared to slay your lord,

Will you offer him a tear

To cleanse the evil of your deeds?

Who shall bless him

Or grieve sincerely?

Who shall weep real tears?

KLYTAIMESTRA: This is not your duty.

Our hands, the hands that killed him,

Shall also perform the burial rites.

But we shall not weep.

Only his child, Iphigeneia,

Shall meet her father beside

The stream that flows with tears.

And there, enfolding him in her arms,

She shall greet him with a kiss.

Antistrophe 4

You returned his wrath

With wrath. Who shall

Decide which deed was

Just? The spoiler

Has been spoiled;

The slayer has atoned for

His crime. Eternal justice

Shall ever stand

Beside

The throne of Zeus: it is decreed

That sorrow shall come to  
Him who gives sorrow, for  
This is the law. No one can  
Remove the curse  
From this race. Their seed is bound  
Fast to ruin.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Now you speak of holy  
Laws and of their sacred truths.  
But I shall swear an oath with the Spirit  
That haunts this house: I  
Shall bear these bitter evils, but we  
Have suffered enough. Now let  
Him go forth to other  
Houses, cursing them with death and guilt.  
I shall be content with few  
Riches, if only I may  
Drive from these halls  
The madness of kindred slaughter.

AIGISTHOS: O Splendid light of day!  
O Joyous day of justice!  
Once more I can say that the immortal  
Gods behold and avenge the crimes of mortals.  
Ah! Sweet sight! There, entangled in the  
Erinyes' web, lies a man who has at last atoned  
For the evils committed by his father.  
Atreus, guileful king of this land  
Drove my father, his brother into exile



When Thyestes challenged the power which Atreus held.  
And when the wretched Thyestes returned  
As a suppliant to his home, he found that  
He was neither in danger of being murdered  
Nor of being forced to soil the doorstone  
Of his ancestors with another's blood.  
Yet Atreus, this man's godless father,  
Received him too eagerly, professing friendship  
And hospitality. Glad day of feasting at  
The house of Atreus! Fresh meat, good cheer!  
But Atreus, served my father the flesh of his  
Own children. He cut away the hands and feet  
And covered them with the carved flesh,  
Serving them in a dish to my father only.  
And Thyestes, ignorant of the deed,  
Ate the roasted flesh until he recognized  
What it was. Horrid meal! Still working  
Destruction against our race! And when Thyestes  
Understood the thing which he had done,  
He spit out the meat, crying and overturning  
The table, cursing with destruction and ruin  
The seed of the Pleisthenes. This is the result.  
I planned this murder. It was a righteous act.  
For I was a helpless infant, my father's  
Third-born son, when Atreus banished him and drove  
Us out. But when I was grown, I returned to bring

Justice, having long ago devised a plot against  
This man. Now, honorably and happy, I can die;  
I have seen this man ensnared in the web of justice.

CHORUS: Aigisthos, your boasting is insolent, for  
Our distress is grievous. If, as you claim,  
You deliberately murdered this man, having devised  
Such a piteous death, then, be assured that you  
Shall not escape the stones hurled by an angry people.

AIGISTHOS: You dare to speak this way to me?

You who sit at the lowest oar, when those  
Who sit on the highest bench have command of the ship?  
You are old, yet you shall learn how hard it is  
To be taught obedience at your age. Chains and  
The pain of starvation teach even old men  
To be prudent. Powerful physicians  
That will teach you wisdom!  
Look! Do you not have eyes to see?  
If you lash out at these goads  
Only you shall be hurt.

CHORUS: Like a woman you remained at home,  
Waiting for the war to end while you disgraced  
The master's bed and plotted this treacherous murder.

AIGISTHOS: Such words as these will soon make you sorrow.

You are not at all like Orpheus, whose  
Joyous voice led creatures to follow. For you,  
Who whimper like a raging puppy, shall yourself

For which you must suffer a fatal penalty.

Be led captive and become gentler when broken.

CHORUS: How can you boast of being lord of the Argives?

If you had planned this murder, why did you not

Dare to enact it with your own hand?

AIGISTHOS: It took a woman to deceive him; I would have

Been suspect, since I have been his enemy from my birth.

Still I shall govern his citizens with his wealth.

He who disobeys me shall learn to bear a heavy yoke,

Never again to run free as a young colt in the traces.

And hunger and the darkness of the dungeon shall

Subdue and break his rebellious spirit.

CHORUS: Base, cowardly man! Why did you not slay

Him yourself? Why did you let his wife pollute

This land and the gods beneath the earth?

Does Orestes still live? Does he still behold

The light of the sun? May fate at last smile

Upon us, permitting him to return and destroy these murderers!

AIGISTHOS: Stubborn creatures! You shall learn!

Come out! Friends, come out and do your work!

CHORUS LEADER: Ready! Seize your swords! Be quick of hand!

AIGISTHOS: My sword is drawn, as well. I do not fear death.

CHORUS: Death it shall be! We welcome this fate!

KLYTAIMESTRA: No, my dearest, no more violence.

We have done enough. What we have already

Sown will be bitter to reap. Too much pain, too much blood.

Elders of Argos, depart; do not commit an act

For which you must suffer a fatal penalty.

It was necessary to do what we have done.

If our suffering is now over, we shall be content,

Although the blows of fate have been heavy to bear.

This is my opinion, if men will accept it.

AIGISTHOS: Their foolish lips have bloomed with leering words.

They are tempting fate when they insult my majesty

And my power. They shall regret it if

They do not heed my wise counsels.

CHORUS: Argive men never have and never will grovel

At the feet of one so base and vile.

AIGISTHOS: I shall remember this.

In days to come do not forget to look behind you,

For I shall be there.

CHORUS: I am not afraid. Fate may yet lead

Crests home again.

AIGISTHOS: Vain hopes, like those upon which exiles feed!

I know; I was one too.

CHORUS: Do what you wish. Defile justice;

Glut yourself! You may not possess the power long.

AIGISTHOS: Folly and insolence! But you shall pay....

CHORUS: Crow and strut like a bold rooster!

Let your hen admire your bravery.

KLYTAIMESTRA: Their rage is impotent. Forget their

Whimperings, dearest, and let us order our own affairs.

You and I are now in power.

(Exeunt Omnes.)



NOTE

The translation of this play is based on the text  
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